

Mel May
Mel Interview 10

Below in black is a word-for-word transcript of the February 12 interview with Mel that is available on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/-LrSrHrcMGw>. In brown are conversations about the Descriptive Experience Sampling process that took place during the interview. In green are Russ's comments, and in blue are Julian's comments about and explanations of the Descriptive Experience Sampling process inserted after the interview. If you have corrections, suggestions, or questions, please post them as YouTube comments.

RTH = Russ Hurlburt

JBK = Julian Bass-Krueger

Mel = Mel May

- 0:00 Comment: We started the recording a few seconds into the conversation.
- 0:00 JBK: Um, yeah. So we missed you saying that, like it had been a while and you felt a little rustier and a little more startled when the beep went off.
- 0:10 Mel: Yes.
- 0:10 JBK: But let's, yeah, let's go into the first beep and see.
- 0:13 RTH: And I was, and I was gonna reply to that by saying, sometimes when people say they're rusty, it turns out *I think* they're rusty as well. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And some they say they're rusty, I *don't* think that, and, uh, so I have an open mind in in that. It's a lot of, a lot of reasons that enter into the self-perception of rustiness, I guess is what that [inaudible]
- 0:35 Mel: Yeah, that's, that's actually true. And I also think, (sorry, side note. Just another...) I think that how I perceive, like, (I ignoring your, your takes and whatever away from every one of these) when, when I think I am happy with how I do, or that I got into interesting areas, or felt like I articulated my experience well for myself or whatever, it's very dependent on so much other stuff that's happening in my life. Like, what, if I'm generally just in a good mood, or if I'm like, swamped with work and too busy, or, y'know what I mean? That just, just as personal feedback, I can just tell based on my life, sometimes I think I'll be quite good at it this time, or I think I won't be. And I, yeah. I mean, subjectively good for me, but that's just an interesting thing that I've noticed. Cuz I also apply the same sort of thinking with like, when I do in sit down interviews with people that are very much about their lives on camera and stuff. I can *tell* if it's not the right time to do that, cuz I'm not in the right space. Sort of, I feel like the same principles apply here. Anyway, that's my opening monologue. [laughs]
- 0:35 Russ comments: Looking back from the end of the interview, I think Mel was not rusty. She was skilled at describing, but her experience had quite a bit of close-to-

nothingness that is hard to describe. (Readers can judge for themselves.) But this is an example of why self-generalization about introspection is not necessarily a trustworthy thing.

1:52 JBK: Okay.

SAMPLE 10.1 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

1:53 Mel: Um, okay. So the first beep went off at 5:42 PM yesterday. Um, and I have written “Nothing to note. I was, um, very much autopilot laying on my bed and in between actions on my laptop. I was looking at the screen of my laptop, but nothing much happening otherwise. There were no internal thoughts or feelings particularly present.”

2:19 JBK: Mm-hmm. So you’re in between actions. You were looking at the screen. Um, was looking at the screen, just your eyeballs happened to be pointed at the screen. Maybe you were visually processing, but you don’t know? Or did that enter your consciousness, before the footlights of your consciousness, as we’ve been saying?

2:41 Mel: I think on this occasion, I, I, I don’t think it did. Like, I can’t even remember what was on my screen. I haven’t written it down. I don’t actually think it was particularly in my consciousness [elongates this word].

2:59 JBK: Okay. So it, it could not have been, or it might have been [Mel: Mm-hmm] a tiny bit, but you don’t remember. But either way it’s not super present to you. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, in between actions. Does, does that figure in something about these actions? Or is that just context as well?

3:19 Mel: I think that’s context in the way of me, um, being like, I, it’s, it’s not like I was *actively* thinking about writing this sentence, or I wasn’t in the process of thinking about doing this thing. I was sort of not doing anything in particular that I could grab at. And therefore I felt like that was quite relevant context to my inner experience.

3:48 JBK: Okay. Um, you think, um, do you think this was in the shades-of-nothing category as a, as a nothing? Or slightly above nothing? Or it’s, it’s hard to even say?

4:03 Mel: No, yeah, I think it’s definitely in that category. I think it is, yeah, slightly above nothing, but pretty nothing!! [laughs]

4:11 JBK: And as I say that I think it might be... I dunno if it’s risky to talk about categories, we should probably look at this experience in particular. Um, but, but go on, you were saying...

4:23 Mel: No, I think you’re right. That based on my own terminology and like whatever, I would, I would use that word to describe this. Yeah.

4:31 JBK: Wait, so I, so *nothing*? or a bit like, *a little bit of something*, or hard to even say...

4:31 Russ comments: I think it is impossible to distinguish experientially between nothing and a little bit of something—when experience is in the weeds, as I might say, that’s as good as one can do. Some philosophic positions believe there is a distinction to be made, as between having no money and having a little bit of money—the possession of a single cent moves you from one category to the other. But in the experiential world (as in the real world), having nothing and having once cent has no practical significance.

In the practice of DES, I think it is a mistake to press too hard on distinctions that are impossible to make—it is (a) a waste of time and energy; (b) erroneously suggests to the participant that they aren’t very good at this; and (c) suggests the importance of philosophical rather than experiential distinctions.

4:38 Mel: I think hard to say now, but certainly like within that ballpark.

4:43 JBK: Okay. Um, so, so here’s what I have. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] You’re looking at your laptop, you’re between actions, you’re on your bed, right? (I mean, this is just context, right?) [Mel: Mm-hmm.] You’re on your bed, but there’s nothing particularly in your awareness. Um, your, your eyes are pointed at the screen, but that might not even be [Mel: Mm-hmm.] y’know, like seeing that. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, ...

5:16 And oh, I do have, okay, so your, your eyes are pointed at your laptop screen as like a fact of reality. You’re not particularly focused on anything or nothing’s particularly catching your eye, but you think just basic *seeing*, like basic kinda seeing of the screen, is it at all, all in your awareness or, or not?

5:16 Russ comments: That is, in my view, a leading question, leaning far too hard on the commonsense theory that if my eyes are open I will be experiencing something visual. Therefore I will disregard any answer to this question. RTH will suggest a nonleading version of the at 8:02, but even that is a very fraught question for two reasons: (a) it would be asked in the context of the previous conversation about little or nothing; and (b) it is itself a little-or-nothing question (this time about visual experience), which I think generally suggest the importance of philosophical rather than experiential distinctions.

Julian comments: Yes I agree about that risk. The commonsense notion is that if your eyes are pointed at something, seeing it must be part of your experience. There is also a risk in the opposite direction—that Mel thinks when I ask if something is experienced that I’m asking if it’s particularly sticking out and occupying attention. To use DES coding, I’ve ruled out that there’s no *sensory awareness* of the laptop but I wanted to back up and see if we could rule out *perceptual awareness*. But I agree with you that my question could have been asked more clearly. And that this is maybe too fine a distinction to make.

Russ comments:

RE “I wanted to ... see if we could rule out *perceptual awareness*.”

For the record, I think *perceptual awareness* is almost always a useless concept because (a) there is no beginning and no end to it—people are almost *always* to some degree perceptually aware; and (b) the *if-my-eyes-are-open-must-be-experiencing-seeing* presupposition is very strong. The present sample is a good example of that. So

I very rarely invoke perceptual awareness in my DES investigations. There are exceptions.

Julian comments: It's true, I don't recall seeing perceptual awareness in your work. But it's quite frequent in theses and dissertations of students you've supervised.

I do wonder to what extent would you say these are reliable? I expect quality must differ. And the degree to which you've supervised and "co-signed" interviewing for a project must differ as well.

As DES grows beyond Las Vegas, issues with assessing quality of interviewing are going to be important. Not everyone who says they're doing DES is going to do it exactly like you do. Well, nobody is entirely. Just saying you're doing DES isn't enough to ensure fidelity. For example, I'm sure my interviewing after this project will be very different from when I started.

My impression is that for me to judge fidelity of other research, I'd have to look at transcripts/video/audio for at least a few interviews. And build up trust in a researcher iteratively. I don't know if long-term there's a shortcut—some kind of DES board that gives a seal of approval. This could make readers complacent against thinking critically when encountering new research. Curious if you have thoughts.

Russ comments:

RE "I don't recall seeing perceptual awareness in your work. But it's quite frequent in theses and dissertations of students you've supervised."

Your observation is correct on both counts. I think making a thing out of perceptual awareness is nearly always a problem because it is a slippery slope and presuppositions abound. My students, I think, are not as sensitized to the risks of presuppositions as am I.

There are rare instances where perceptual awareness makes sense. Making up an example:

At the moment of the beep "Bill" is seeing a dart (which is lying on the pub bar). The dart is experienced, but he is not attending to any particular aspect of it—not to the color of the feathers, not to the shininess of the tip, etc. (that is, this is not sensory awareness). There is nothing meta about it, but there is also nothing *nothing* about it—the dart is there and he sees it in what seems to be a pretty standard perceptual figure/ground sort of way—his experience is mostly of the dart, while the bar and the rest of the clutter are not of perceptual interest.

It seems adequate to me to call Bill's experience *perceptual awareness*. If you don't call it perceptual awareness, what do you call it? You can't say there's *nothing* in his experience, because he has made the dart the figural aspect of his experience.

Here's another made-up example:

[Charles is playing darts; he hits the bullseye and immediately] says to himself in his inner voice "Bullseye!"

Certainly, DES should say that this is inner speaking. But should DES say that it is inner speaking *and also* perceptual awareness (of the dart in the target? If you answer that question Yes, then a whole lot (probably nearly all) DES samples should be called perceptual awareness (think of Mel vacuuming, or watching *Saltburn*, or talking to her

sister, or...). There is no beginning or end to what should be called perceptual awareness.

So I'm happier to call Bill's sample perceptual awareness than Charles's, because there is a centrality of the perceptual awareness for Bill that is not present for Charles. Bill's experience is aimed directly at, is consumed by, the dart. His experience starts with the dart and ends with the dart. By contrast, Charles's experience of the dart is not central, not consumed by the dart. His experience starts with the dart, includes the position of the dart, includes the context (score, history, interpersonal) of the game, and is articulated in a non-dart-central way. So I think it is more faithful to Bill to call his experience perceptual awareness of the dart, but not faithful to use the same description of Charles.

The bottom line: for me, if the perception is perceptual central *and that's all there is*, I can call it perceptual awareness. But I wouldn't call something a perceptual awareness if there was something else ongoing.

The only time I am really happy to call an experience *perceptual awareness* is when a participant has a very lot of Bill-type (exclusively perceptual awareness) experiences and very few other kinds of experiences. That is a fairly rare occurrence, but it is worth noting when it occurs.

RE judging fidelity / assessing quality

These are a hugely important issues for me, about which I have spent many (probably thousands of) hours contemplating, and which, truth be told, doubtless was a major motivator behind my willingness to engage with Julian in the current project. Julian has in past years sent me descriptions of Julian-written DES results that I did not trust (and told him so, and why). Is that Russ-doesn't-trust-Julian's-descriptions a parochialism of Russ? Or Russ's self-aggrandizement? Or Russ's laziness? Or is it Julian's unwarranted claims? Or Julian's eagerness? Or Julian's presuppositions playing out? Or some or all of the above? The present interaction is an $N = 1$ adventure into these issues.

Those are personal issues: about *Russ* as a real flesh-and-blood person, and about *Julian* as a real flesh-and-blood person, each with interests, responsibilities, ignorances, and so on. This is not about how to tell whether *a DES investigator is good enough*; this is how to tell whether *Russ* is good enough, and about how to tell whether *Julian* is good enough. Who's to judge?

And suppose it is the case that Russ is a too-narrow *do-it-my-way-or-the-highway* person. Then what? *Can* Russ change? *Should* Russ change? And if so, how should that change be effected and/or documented?

And suppose it is the case that Julian is a too *I-think-I'm-better-at-this-than-I-deserve-to-think* person. Then what? *Can* Julian change? *Should* Julian change? And if so, how should that change be effected and/or documented? And if Julian can and should and does change, increasing his skills and decreasing his confidence until they align, then what? Would Russ recognize that? Does it matter whether Russ recognizes that?

So far, everything in this comment is personal about Russ and Julian. If we could figure something out about Russ and/or Julian, then what? Is there anything of value that extends beyond Russ and Julian as mere grain-of-sand mortals?

RE “I don’t know if long-term there’s a shortcut—some kind of DES board that gives a seal of approval. This could make readers complacent against thinking critically when encountering new research.”

I don’t know either. Over the years, many people have suggested to me that I create such a board, and I have resisted the idea, at least in part for the reason you advanced. But I think it is worse than that—a DES board would have to be (as it seems to me—maybe I am mistaken) an exercise in validity, when DES is an exercise in fidelity. But it could be just my personal reluctance to make hard decisions about other people.

Julian comments: You ask a lot of important questions and I can’t answer all of them. Except for *should Julian change*? Yes, my goal here is to improve. I do think you’re right about DES being a skill—like playing violin. When I first started, I thought I was pretty good at it. I’d read a lot of books about violin playing (aka your DES books). But I see now that it takes a lot more practice.

As for *can or should Russ change*, I don’t know. I do think you’re a curious mix of extremely open to change and also extremely stubborn. Open to change in that you’re open to the process of abrading presuppositions through contact with inner experience. Stubborn in the sense that anything *outside* of this is unlikely to interfere with your convictions. I do admire that you’ve held steadfast in these convictions, developing DES while the field around you has gone in an entirely different direction—towards big data, brain localization, diagnosis, categorization, standardized questionnaires, AI, etc. As you said, a generality can’t abrade a generality (Interview 4, 41:17). So if I ever do change your mind about something, it will probably be through experience itself, whoever we’re interviewing.

5:41 Mel: Yeah. Yeah.

5:41 JBK: Or in your consciousness?

5:43 Mel: Yeah, it is. Like, it’s not like I’m sitting there and like physically pointed at it, but not like aware of the fact that I’m looking at a laptop or anything. Like, yes, I am present in my reality, I guess. And that’s like what I’m trying to say is it’s not like I’m daydreaming *per se*, do y’know what I mean? Which is probably a whole different kettle of fish. But as in, yeah, I’m locked in with the environment that I’m in. It’s in my awareness as much as it can be without being like, um, like what is it, what, you alluded to it before, Julian, and like, Russ, you sometimes say of like, yeah, you’re looking, but you’re not like, I can’t remember but when we do the hearing, one of like, you’re listening but you’re not hearing or whatever. The looking version of that is what I was doing, I would say, you are looking but not seeing, or whatever.

6:33 JBK: So looking but not, not noticing any particular thing. [Mel: Yeah.] Right? Not focused on any particular thing. [Mel: Yeah.] But you think some basic seeing thing is conscious or the possibility that it’s not, it doesn’t even enter your consciousness, your inner, your experience before the footlights?

6:51 Mel: No, I think it does. And maybe I, maybe I’ve, um, contradicted myself at some point there, but I think it does, but not at any deeper level than that.

- 6:51 Russ comments: I think she has contradicted herself several times, which is why (as I said at 4:31 and 5:16) I think it is not fruitful to go too far into these weeds.
- 7:03 JBK: Okay. Because I, yeah, I was curious cuz I was going back to the day-2 transcripts and in similar kinds of things. [Mel: Mm.] I'm not sure if we made it clear. Like, like when I say just, just looking and it somehow enters your consciousness. I, I don't necessarily mean it has to be like, focused on any particular thing or anything has to be striking. Um, but I'm, I'm also not sure in this questioning now if I was being too suggestive [Mel: Mm.] and, and was like, well, your eyeballs are pointed at it, so it wasn't, it somehow in like in your inner experience. Um, so I dunno if I muddied the waters a little bit. I, but I just wanted to explore that strand.
- 7:03 Julian comments: Even at the time of interviewing, I did have the same reservations that you voiced Russ.
- 7:54 RTH: So let me, the, I think the waters might be a little bit muddied, but let me, let me explore it in a little bit different way and see whether we can get to it.
- 8:01 Mel: Mm-hmm.
- 8:02 RTH: So there's a lot of stuff going on in your environment. You're laying on your bed, there's the pressure of the mattress on, on or sheets or whatever it is on your backside or side or wherever it is. All that stuff is, and the, and the temp- the temperature. Not, not only the pressure, but the temperature of the room or whatever—all the, all that stuff is in some way being processed in your body / mind, how, whatever you wanna call that. And the question, I think, that Julian was trying to get at is, are the, is what's coming in through your eyeballs more conscious, more before the footlights of your consciousness than the rest of all of the rest of that stuff in the welter of your *potential* experiences? Or is it just the case that all of this stuff is sort of context? I'm not fallin' outta my bed, so I'm processing where it is that I'm in my bed; and I'm not putting the sheets over me or whatever, because the temperatures are okay; but I'm not thinking, *oh, the temperature's okay—I don't have to put sheets on*. So the question is: is it the case that my eyeballs are processing something before the footlights of my consciousness more than my backside is processing the mattress? [Mel: Mm.] Or is it more or less the same thing?
- 9:23 Mel: Um, I would say yes, my eyeballs are processing more than the rest, but still like very minimal. Like, yes, there's a distinction to be made there, but I, but not a great one.
- 9:23 Russ comments: Recall that in the 5:16 comment I said I would disregard anything that would be upcoming, and so I would disregard this conclusion. There may have been some value in the conversation, but that would be as iterative preparation for upcoming samplings.
- 9:40 RTH: Okay. So what I would say is that the, the advantage of asking the questions like that makes the question not so much about the words. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Because what you were trying to do, Julian I think was trying to get the, trying to get us to be able to

parse words and say, well, it's this and it's not that, which I think is difficult, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] and, and so has the tendency to muddy the waters. Whereas if you put it into, well, there's, there's different aspects. And if I had led, if I had led with those, with those questions, rather than the questions that, that, that, that focused it in just on the eyeballs, [JBK: Yeah] then I don't, I don't know where we would've gotten. Um, so we, we ended up in the same place as we did with the word questions. But whether that's the *result* of the word questions or whether that's the result of the experience, I don't think we can tell. [JBK: Mm-hmm.]

10:35 JBK: What to you is more a word question?

10:35 Russ comments:

RE "What to you is more a word question?"

The question RTH was reacting to was JBK 6:33. Mel (5:43) had said that she was "looking but not seeing." JBK (6:33) responded:

So looking but not, not noticing any particular thing. [Mel: Yeah.] Right? Not focused on any particular thing. [Mel: Yeah.] But you think some basic seeing thing is conscious or the possibility that it's not, it doesn't even enter your consciousness, your inner, your experience before the footlights?

JBK's grammar presumes that "not noticing any particular thing" is Mel's definition of "not seeing." That may or may not (probably not, in my view) be what Mel meant. But that was not confirmed, clarified, or repudiated.

Next he says "some basic seeing thing," which is meaningless unless there is a shared definition of *some*, and of *basic*, and of *seeing thing*, which I doubt there is.

Then comes "is conscious" or "enter your consciousness," which are entirely ambiguous terms.

So I think Mel at 5:43 is trying to convey her experience, and JBK at 6:33 is trying to assist in that endeavor, but I think JBK and Mel are colluding (unwittingly) to presume that they know what each other are talking about, presuming that they share an understanding of the words they are using. I think that presumption is not warranted. So I call JBK 6:33 a word question, because they are sending words to each other without sending shared meanings to each other, unless you assume shared understanding of the words.

My 8:02 question tries to presume none of those things, tries to make explicit what I am talking about in a way that does *not* depend on the particular definition of any particular words. (Of course, one can argue that I fall short.)

JBK provides a summary at 14:05; see the comment at 14:25.

10:46 RTH: Well, in, uh, there are a lot of different kinds of word questions, but in, but in this one, it was trying to, trying to parse *by using words*, whether there was some *experience*, some *awareness*. So we were gonna try to, what we were trying to do was to see whether we could find some shared definition of *experience* and *awareness* or something which would lead us to *conclude* that there was something before the footlights of consciousness.

11:18 JBK: Or conclude that there wasn't,

- 11:21 RTH: Or that, or that there wasn't. Right.
- 11:23 JBK: If there was or wasn't something. [RTH: Yeah.] Yeah, okay. Yeah. I like what you, bringing in these other aspects, y'know, lying in the bed, feeling the covers because by just focusing on the, on the, looking at the screen. I dunno why I chose that particular element. Maybe because it might have popped out the most, but yeah to see if that was, or if it wasn't like, somehow not just [Mel: Mm] a fact of context, the thing that was going on, but if it was actually somehow experienced. But yeah, I think by focusing too much on that as opposed to comparing it to other stuff going on. Yeah. I, I like your line of questioning, Russ.
- 12:02 RTH: The, the advant- the advantage of the comparison is that it, it, it does I think as good, as good as I, as I know how to do anyway, *leave out* trying to figure out what *awareness* means [Mel: Mm] and what, what *consciousness* means and, and all that stuff. And nobody's got any good definition of that. And there's no reason to believe that Mel's definition of *awareness* is gonna be the same as Julian's definition of *awareness*. No, no matter how you work at it. [Mel: Mm.] Consciousness scientists have been working on that for, y'know, a thousand years or 20 years or how- whatever, and they can't agree. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]
- 12:02 Julian comments: Interesting that you give the options of scientists working at it for a thousand years or 20 years. Very different! But it illustrates your point, because consciousness scientists might say: "No! This is now a completely new discussion, we have a new understanding of neuroanatomy and new working definitions," when in reality the discussion's just as muddy.
- 12:42 JBK: Alright.
- 12:43 RTH: But either, *either way*, what I would say, is that we're pretty close to the bottom of the weeds here. It is nothing or next to nothing? [Mel: Yeah.] Don't really know. Probably, probably it would, we would end up with, well it was either no- nothing or next to nothing regardless of whether we had asked Julian's line of questioning or my line of questioning. [Mel: Yeah.] [JBK: Mm.] And, and, and I think that's the limitation of the method and the limitation of probably *all* introspection. You can't really determine a bright line between nothing and next to nothing. [Mel: Mm.] [JBK: Yeah.]
- 13:19 Mel: I also, that was interesting what you said, Russ, cuz sometimes I do find the, um, words like *consciousness* and like *awareness*—sometimes I can find them a little bit overwhelming, [JBK: Mm.] Cuz like yeah, and I think it's to do with what you said of like, I *think* I know what we all mean when we're saying that. But like, uh, I *hope* I think the same thing? Cuz, so I, I immediately get a bit nervous and overwhelmed when we get *really* fixated on that terminology, even though I know it's sort of necessary.
- 13:54 JBK: Yeah.
- 13:58 RTH: They're, they are difficult if not impossible words. [Mel: Yeah.] I personally think they're probably impossible, but

- 14:05 JBK: [laughs] but I think I threw out all of them at some point *inner experience, before the footlights of consciousness*, [RTH: Right] just cuz I feel like each of them has some connotation or some way of that you'll probably think of it. So, so I was trying to,
- 14:25 RTH: And I, I agree that you did, and I thought that was good. [JBK: Yeah.] But, but I, but I don't think it, I don't... [pause] So you can, you, you can put out a constellation, and, and you, Julian, would add words until you thought that you've put out a constellation which is adequately ambiguous or adequately multi-perspectives. [Mel: Mmm.] But whether Mel would have the same set of perspectives, that's hard to know. [JBK: Yeah.] Probably impossible to know. [Mel: Mm.] [JBK laughs softly] And it's better than just saying—So I, so I, I agree that putting out a whole lot of different aspects is better than just saying, *well, is this in your consciousness or not?* And just leaving one word—I agree that it's better than that, [Mel: Yeah.] but, [pause] but with limitations. [Mel: Yeah. I agree with that.. Um okay, next one?] Number 2?

14:25 Russ comments:

RE "But with limitations."

Looking back at this interview from a few weeks later, I think RTH at 14:25 is far more generous than I actually am. The limitations are far greater than RTH implied.

RE "I think the "I threw out all of them at some point *inner experience, before the footlights of consciousness*, just cuz I feel like each of them has some connotation or some way of that you'll probably think of it."

This is a good summary of what I think is a word question (see 10:35). Julian tried at 10:35 (and summarizes here) to create a network of words in the hopes that the overlapping connotations will convey something with precision or fidelity. I think that is optimistic. I think it (probably more) likely that the stream of words will chase each other much like a satellite orbits the earth: the satellite is always making a downwards turn, always trying to get closer to the ground, but is never successful.

For words to get to the ground, we need to ensure that we know what we're talking about in a concrete, grounded sense (not in a network-of-definitions sense). That is the point of the (admittedly repetitive) references such as in RTH 8:02.

This discussion illustrates that I think that any attempt at describing experience must operate within the constraints that such an attempt imposes (see my 2011 book). One important constraint is that it is probably impossible to distinguish experientially between none and a little; another constraint is that it is probably impossible to agree with precision about terms like *consciousness* and *awareness*.

Some would say, as a result, that introspection-y endeavors such as DES are worthless—if you don't know what you're talking about, why do it? I think that is hugely misguided, probably because most introspective attempts fail to constrain themselves within the limits imposed on the process. Those attempts are justifiably criticized.

DES, however, tries to operate within the constraints, which requires that we be content to not know some things (such as whether it is little or no experience). But that does *not* make the method worthless. We can say with confidence that at 5:42 yesterday, Mel was *not* innerly speaking "Four score and seven years ago..." or any other words; Mel was *not* innerly seeing an airplane flying into a tower or any other

visual image; and so on. We can say such things with confidence, and we have warrant to be believed when we say them, because we are willing to live within the constraints that the exploration of inner experience imposes. If we play fast and loose with those constraints, perhaps because we have philosophical interests, personal proclivities, or whatever, then the warrant evaporates.

Q: You criticize Julian's questions as being about the words. But your 8:02 question is in words, too. Why do you think your question is not about the words?

A: That is a hugely important issue, so let me be as brutally schematic as I can be. Julian asked: Is it in awareness? Is it conscious? Is it in consciousness? Is it before the footlights of consciousness? All those terms are abstractions, theoretical constructs, with at best loose connections to actual experience. Philosophers debate the definition of those words, and there is no reason to believe that Mel's definitions match Julian's. Julian can, as he said, throw out all those words in the belief that they have different connotations, and that his network of word connotations will be informative for Mel. Mel hears that network of words, each with its own connotation *for her*, and out of her connotation network comes to believe that she understands what Julian is asking. (Or just because she is a nice person, she goes along with Julian, but let's set that aside.) But there is no reason to believe that each word has the same connotations for Mel as they have for Julian, and no reason to believe that the network of words/connotations leads to the same understanding for Mel as for Julian. Even if Julian were a leading expert in consciousness studies, and so understands exactly what he means by those words and their connotations, and even if Mel were a leading expert in consciousness studies, there is still no warrant for believing that Mel understands the connotation network in the same way as does Julian. In short, I think Mel and Julian engage in an unwitting collusion where each will pretend to understand what the other means, when in reality each doesn't really know what they or the other are talking about.

And equally importantly, the question asks whether Mel's experience fits in that category. That is, this is a comparison of experience to a network of word connotations. That is, this is about the words.

Russ asked: Is it more than your backside experiencing the edge of the mattress so you don't fall off the bed? Is it more than you're cold needing more covers? These are not technical abstractions that require precise definition.

And equally importantly, these is a comparison of Mel's experience *to Mel's own experience*; this is *not* a comparison of Mel's experience to a network of word connotations. This is not about any philosophical nicety such as whether experience is rich or thin. Regardless of the rich or thinness, the question is whether, at the moment of the beep, one aspect of Mel's experience is more or less salient than some other aspect of Mel's experience. It is not about the words.

SAMPLE 10.2 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

15:21 Mel: So this one went off at 6:00 PM and I've written, um, "I could hear mum in the distance, the exact word she was saying...." Uh, sorry, let me rephrase. "I could hear my mommy in the distance and I could hear the exact words she was saying, but they

were very peripheral. Um, I was looking at my laptop still, and I don't recall any distinct thought or feeling."

15:55 RTH: So at the moment of the beep, are you hearing your mom's exact words?

16:01 Mel: Yes.

16:04 RTH: And somehow... So I'm trying to sort through the difference between "could hear," "hear," "peripherally hear," "centrally hear,"

16:16 Mel: Mm hmm. So I think also important context there is she was in a, a room halfway down the house, so I guess the words are like quite physically distant. Um, so, but I feel like that is also sorta how I, yeah, that's relevant to how I then sort of was aware of them. Like I know when I, when the beep went off and then I reflected on what was happening, I know for a fact that I could hear the exact words she was saying. Was it the forefront of my awareness or my consciousness? Absolutely not. But was it definitely part of it? Yes. Was me looking at my laptop and doing whatever I was doing more in my awareness [gestures straight ahead]? Yes. But that [gestures off to the right, apparently referring to the mother's voice] was definitely there. And so that's why I've tried to describe that as like this peripheral thing in my awareness. It's definitely in my consciousness, but it's not like [claps hands together] it was the main foc-. I'm not like locked in, definitely listening to what mom's saying.

17:19 RTH: And, and is mom saying intelligible words in the sense that I'm understanding what she's saying? Or is it I am hearing what my mom's saying? I can hear the words, but I'm not really, I don't even know what she's really talking about. That hasn't penetrated...

17:33 Mel: Me. I didn't write the words down cuz I didn't really feel like it was relevant, but it was exact words. So like, say she was saying, "what do you want for dinner?" to my brother, or something like it, I definitely knew what she was saying and it was...

17:45 RTH: So you knew. [Mel: Yeah.] These were not just sounds that were forming [Mel: Yeah.] words. These were, these were words with meaning or whatever. [Mel: Yeah.] But they weren't, they weren't central to you.

17:54 Mel: Yeah.

17:55 RTH: Got it. And then I am in some way seeing my keyboard, or seeing my screen, I guess.

18:04 Mel: Yep. It was my screen. Yeah.

18:08 RTH: Is there more to say about that?

18:10 Mel: Um, well, the only other thing I wrote was that it's very much the same as the above. So I can't even, like, I don't think I was doing anything particularly interesting. I was just doing boring work-related stuff. Um, so I'm just written that in terms of like, yeah, inner awareness, there wasn't anything particularly conscious beyond the, what we

spoke about in the previous beep of taking in the information that I'm looking at in some way, hearing mom in the distance. But that's about it. There was definitely nothing meta or nothing, I wasn't like contemplating anything, or, y'know?

- 18:53 RTH: So I'm, I'm gather, I, I'm totally understanding that there's no contemplation going on. There's no secondary channel or whatever you wanna call that, about this. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] What I haven't yet figured out is whether there's more visual awareness here than there was in the previous beep. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] or whether they're both sort of at the fringes of, I'm seeing it, but not really.
- 19:21 Mel: I would say *that*.
- 19:26 RTH: So they're, they're they're both *almost nothing*. Is is that...?
- 19:30 Mel: Yeah. Like, like, um, facts of my reality, but, but from an awareness perspective, like fringes of sort of relevance.
- 19:43 RTH: Okay. And are you typing at this, at this moment?
- 19:47 Mel: No, I wasn't. So again, I was like in between like actions *per se*. And I think that that's sort of relevant to the inner experience that like, I wasn't really in the middle of doing anything. So,
- 20:02 RTH: Ok. And when we talked about the first beep, I, I don't think we ever said anything at all about what was on the screen, [Mel: Mmm.] as if that was probably hardly even relevant. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Is that true here too? That that what was on the screen isn't even really relevant? Whether this is an economics report or, or the Australian newscast or, or, or the whatever, whatever.
- 20:25 Mel: Yeah, I think for these, these both of them, uh, it wasn't super relevant. I wasn't like, I wasn't engaged enough with the contents on the screen for that to feel relevant.
- 20:38 RTH: So it wouldn't, it *wouldn't* be good idea to say I was, I was watching the newscast or whatever it is that's on the screen, even though I wasn't really paying attention to it. And certainly not thinking about it, but I was, I was engaged with it. It's much less than that.
- 20:54 Mel: Much less than that. Like I think, I think I had my emails open or something. Like I wa- there, I definitely wasn't like watching anything or whatever. There was stuff on my screen, but it wasn't engaging me at that point in time, for sure.
- 21:10 RTH: Okay. Then what I've got, and I'm done, unless somebody's going to else gonna, or Julian has more to say, what I've got is: I am visually processing, I guess you could say what was going on, on, on the screen, but *not* in any way that grabs my footlights of consciousness in any *strong* way. [Mel: Hmm.] And at the same time, I am, [coughs] excuse me, auditorially processing my mother speaking. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And I hear her to be speaking. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And I know what she's saying, but I'm not engaged with that either.

- 21:10 Russ comments: "I know what she's saying, but I'm not engaged with that" seems, on reflection, not quite right. It makes it too meta-analytical, as well as too specific." Might have been better to say something like "Before-the-footlights-of-consciousness I'm hearing her speaking, but it's peripheral, I'm not engaged with it."
- 21:57 Mel: Mm. Yeah. [Julian: Um] [they speak simultaneously] It feels (oh, sorry, Julian), that feels accurate. But then it feels weird to hear you say that back, doesn't it? Cuz I'm saying like, her words were not super present, but the laptop was not super present. So it's sort of like this weird version of like, my actual central experience is still that sort of weeds of nothingness, but there's this sort of stuff happening, but that's still not enough to [clenches and shakes her hands] be the bones of the experience, if that makes any sort of sense.
- 22:31 RTH: Well I'm not sure I understood *that*. What, what I, what I understand *so far*, and, and correct me if my understanding is wrong, is that there, it, it *is* both aspects of these are close to the weeds of nothingness, in experience.
- 22:47 Mel: Yes. Yeah. As in like, but it, it sounded weird to hear you say that back when like there's actual things, like I'm looking at a laptop and I can hear something, yet I'm still saying it's this nothingness. But that is true for me. So as long as you, um, understand...
- 23:02 RTH: So, so, so that's the advantage of the line of questioning that we were talking about ear- earlier on. Like right, right now you're processing the couch that you're sitting on and whatever it is that you got in your hands and whatever, that's not in your awareness, in the footlights of your awareness stuff. You're intelligently processing it, skillfully processing it. [Mel: Mm.] But that doesn't mean that it had that, that it enters into the, *at all* the foreground of your
- 23:32 Mel: Consciousness. [RTH: Consciousness.] Yeah, I understand. Yep. Then yes, where we got to there feels [inaudible]
- 23:38 RTH: And that and that, and *that* makes it seem, I guess, less weird because we're, we're really, I think we're processing thousands of things all at one time. We're multiprocessors. [Mel: Mm.] And most of the time, most of the time that processing takes place outside of awareness, cuz we don't, cuz the world is okay, sort of. And, uh, don't have to...I don't have to go that.
- 24:01 Mel: And then, so I think that's the thing that maybe that's what's frustrated me this week a little bit or something, of like trying to work out then what is relevant or interesting or whatever—*interesting's* the wrong word, but y'know—what's relevant to these descriptions that finds the distinction between that stuff in terms of like, I don't wanna bombard you with like, well here's all these like really mundane things that I *guess* I was processing if I th- think, but they weren't like super in my awareness, but then I'm, but if I think about, y'know, like I could've recorded this beep and been like, *well, there was sort of nothing* again, y'know?

- 24:43 JBK: That would've been fine, too, if that describes your experience as sort of nothing. I don't think there's a need to, to stretch and make anything more than it is. [Mel: Mm.] Um, I think we're both happy to look at if things are on the fringes, even if we can't be totally sure how in the fringes they are. But, but it's okay also to say that, I dunno, just to describe it how it is.
- 25:10 Mel: Mm. The, *is* is the challenging part though. [laughs]
- 25:14 JBK: Yeah.
- 25:16 RTH: What I, I would say about that is that if we get samples [Mel: Mm-hmm] where there is something which is clearly before the footlights of your consciousness, then we will be able to contrast *that* with *this*. [Mel: Yeah.] And if we *don't*, then we'll then, then we will, then something *else* will happen, then we'll have to figure that out.
- 25:16 Russ comments: Said another way: I trust the iterative procedure to take us as far as we can legitimately get.
- 25:36 Mel: Yep. Okay. Um,
- 25:40 JBK: Just one thing about this one. Um, so your mom is speaking, it's peripheral, it's on the fringes. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] But it is those exact words and those words have some meaning. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Is, is meaning part of it and some fringe way, some understanding or, or do you just mean that the words are actual words and not nonsense, but you're not, you're not, uh, attaching any kind of meaning to it in that moment?
- 26:11 Mel: No, that's a really interesting question. That's, I like that, um, because I know what you mean. And No, I was aware that yeah, she was saying words that have meaning, but I wasn't hearing them and then taking meaning from them. No. [JBK: Okay.] I remember thinking that at the time. Like I know she distinctively said, "what do you want for dinner?" or whatever it was she said, but I wasn't then thinking further about that. They still remained as this like peripheral thing.
- 26:39 JBK: Okay. Yeah. Then I'm clear on this sample.
- 26:44 RTH: Me too. Number 3.

SAMPLE 10.3 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

- 26:45 Mel: Alright. Um, this one went off at 6:36 PM and I wrote... oh, yeah um, "I just noticed something wrong with the document that I was designing on my laptop. I felt confusion and disappointment, but it wasn't a verbal thought, it was a sensation. I didn't describe my feeling to myself, et cetera. I was just looking at the screen and then just before the beep went off, I was overcome with that sort of emotion." I was *annoyed*.

- 27:16 JBK: Alright, so this confusion, disappointment, annoying, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] annoy-ment sensation. Um, did, did that have a, a physical location or not even physical or some kind of location?
- 27:33 Mel: I don't think so, no. It was definitely a clear sensation that I know I felt, but didn't manifest itself physically.
- 27:43 JBK: Was, so, was it, um, would you say it was in this moment, confusion, disappointment, annoyance about something in specific? Like was it about the thing that was happening? Or was it just kind of these sensations or these kind of emotions themselves?
- 27:43 Julian comments: I think my two questions came too early—about a location and about 'aboutness'. I could have started with a simple: is there more to say about that?
- 28:04 Mel: They were reactionary. Um, but, but beyond that, it, I just feel like, as in... I noticed a, I noticed an, a mistake on the document I was designing [JBK: Mm-hmm] that led to these feelings. But were those feelings then like that they were the same confusion, annoyance whatever the same way I experienced those any other time, but there was, it was certainly a reactionary thing associated with, yeah, me discovering this like, mistake.
- 28:40 JBK: Before I ask questions, trying to get specifics based on, I dunno how I think I might differentiate. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Is there, is there more you could say about these? Or more detail you could give about these emotions? Like how you, how it was at this moment?
- 28:59 Mel: Um, which exact words did I say? Confusion, disappointment... Um, like definitely negative. [laughs] Um, and, uh, frustration. Um, how do I, I dunno how to explain what that feels like [pause] [JBK: Mm-hmm] apart from it being a negative thing.
- 29:31 JBK: So it's, it's negative and it's, you say it's strong at this moment?
- 29:31 Russ comments: She hasn't, that I heard, said it's strong. She has said she was "overcome" by it (26:45), and whereas for most people that would imply *strong*, but for Mel, *overcome* is similar to *overwhelm*, which Mel has used repeatedly in a non-strong way (meaning something like *before the footlights of consciousness*). And she has said it was "clear" (27:33), but that doesn't necessarily imply strong. JBK might be right, but by being out ahead of Mel, he undermines confidence in the result.
- 29:36 Mel: Yes.
- 29:38 JBK: So it's strong. So we can compare this to the previous beeps with things at the, at the fringes. How, how [inaudible]
- 29:38 Julian comments:
RE [inaudible], transcribing comment:

The end of JBK 29:38 is inaudible because of crosstalk from Mel. However, if I isolate audio tracks (which I can do because of the Zencast recording setup) I can hear that I say “how would you compare it to...?” maybe referring to the previous beep. The question is whether “how would you compare it to...?” should be included in the transcript, replacing “[inaudible]”. With the cross-talk, Mel doesn’t hear this, and also I’m quite quiet with it since Mel’s already talking. So I feel like it’s unimportant and more faithful to the conversation to leave it out. Not so crucial, but I’ve done a similar thing in some other spots too, where it seems more faithful not to transcribe every word.

Russ comments: It is a dilemma. The solution, I think, is not to care too much about the transcript, one way or the other. The transcript is merely a pointer to the video. The video is merely a pointer to what Mel and Julian and Russ said. What Mel and Julian and Russ said is merely a pointer to Mel’s at-the-moment-of-the-beep experience, and that is what is interesting. The object, I think, is to do pretty darn well each one of those *merely* acts, because that makes life easier up the line. But the faithfulness that is desirable is to Mel’s experience, not to the transcript. That is, we should recognize that the transcript, no matter how well it is done, falls short of the video; and the video, no matter how well it is done, falls short of Mel and our actual talk; and our actual talk falls short of Mel’s experience at the moment of the beep. Our task is to do as good a job as we can and then trust the iterative process to provide us with additional details down the line.

- 29:47 Mel: Almost the exact opposite. [laughs]
- 29:51 JBK: Mm-hmm. And so like, so what does it mean for it to be strong at this moment in your experience?
- 30:01 Mel: That, I would say, that the stuff that I’ve described as peripheral or whatever in other beeps [JBK: Mm-hmm.] there was no awareness of anything else. So this was very much the central focus of my awareness. So I became- anything else became not part of my awareness because I was overcome with this emotion. [JBK: Okay.] Um, yeah.
- 30:30 JBK: Would, would you say it’s one emotion? Or would you say it’s different strands of different emotions? Maybe some confusion, disappointment, annoyance? Are all these just ways of describing one, one emotion at this moment, or you’re not sure?
- 30:46 Mel: Yeah, I’m, uh, I think that’s semantics based on how I experience emotion. Like, I don’t, I, I just think that I’m more complex enough to ever be able, more complex than to ever just prescribe one word to my emotions. So that’s why I would lob out a few. Um, but it just feels like a state of being, I suppose. And then I’m just clutching at words that perhaps feel relevant. Um, yeah.
- 30:46 Russ comments: Spoiler alert: At 44:06, RTH says he doesn’t really believe, or is skeptical about, much of what develops in the discussion between now and then, and later we agree that it might be desirable for me to point out where and/or why that skepticism arises. I will try to do so in the comments between now and then. For

viewers who would find such commentary distracting, I recommend skipping the comments for the remainder of this sample (and then coming back if desired).

Mel so far has described, believably to me, that at the moment of the beep she is experiencing confusion / disappointment / annoyance, a mental (by which I mean non-bodily) feeling that is in reaction to a problem on the screen.

31:19 JBK: Um, knowing that it's not about the words, um, [laughs] is there any particular word you've lobbed out that feels most apt or, y'know, confusion, disappointment, annoyance, frustration, or is it all part of the kind of constellation?

31:19 Russ comments: My antennae jangle: He says it is not about the words, but he makes it about the words. I don't know what will result from that, but it is worrisome.

31:34 Mel: Constellation. But I tell you what, actually, I will say confusion was there initially when I noticed the mistake. Like, so that definitely led things off. It was like, *oh, what the hell!?* And then it was like the more, the stronger negative things of like disappointment, frustration, annoyance, like that sort of stuff. But there was certainly confusion first of like, wait, I've noticed a thing. And then the other emotion sort of unraveled as a constellation secondary to that.

31:34 Russ comments: Jangle: Up 'til now, Mel has referred to *one* emotion. For example, in what she wrote in her notebook: "I just noticed something wrong with the document that I was designing on my laptop. I felt confusion and disappointment, but it wasn't a verbal thought, *it was* a sensation. I didn't describe my feeling to myself, et cetera. I was just looking at the screen and then just before the beep went off, I was overcome with that sort of emotion." And it has been singular since then.

Beginning at 31:34, there are two separate emotions.

32:09 JBK: Okay. Would you be able to say what kind of the last thing before the beep was?

32:09 Russ comments: Jangle: Mel and JBK have agreed, perhaps without noticing, to talk about feelings in the plural.

32:18 Mel: Uh, well, well, the, that, that whole process happens very quickly; of like from, from normal to confusion-noticing to then anger-I'm annoyed like that happens, [snaps fingers] y'know, like that. So, [JBK: Okay] that kind of all happened just before the beep went off, like that whole, that exact moment of noticing, annoyed, angry, but that is a split second.

32:18 Russ comments: Jangle: That is an entirely logical-sounding process. However, I worry about logical-sounding processes unless they (a) occur from the beginning of the exposition and/or (b) have been set up by an iterative process whereby I am confident that interviewer and interviewee know what they are talking about. Rule of thumb: the more logical the process, the *less* likely it was experienced, because the more likely it is a self-theory.

In short, there could have been, but wasn't, a substantial amount of foot-dragging that might have been iteratively useful (so that *next time* if there was a rapid sequencing of feelings, we would be in a better position to talk about it).

- 32:50 JBK: Okay. So no- you notice, is there a bit of context about what this mistake was? Just,
- 32:57 Mel: Yeah, it was just like I was, um, actually redesigning my personal website. So, and just like some formatting of the, the design layout was off. And so some, I spent ages on it and then it, two columns weren't lined up, and I was like, *oh, what the hell?* I've just spent ages on that. Why? And I couldn't work out why it wasn't lining up. It should have been, they were the same size, et cetera.
- 33:23 JBK: So it's not lining up. Um, so could you go through again, um, like the kind of sequence when you say it was first confusion and then this, and then that. Do you, do you, are you just saying that like, things progressed in a sequence, but you're, you're not sure if it was disappointment and then frustration or this or that or that? Or are you saying that this is kind of the exact order? Or you, so basically are you just saying that it was a kind of a rapid shift, but, but kind of uncertain?
- 33:23 Russ comments: Jangle: *Sequence* is a strong/precise word, and it is JBK's, not Mel's. In 32:18 she gave some this-and-then-that's, but there were several of them and not in the same order. This is, to my antennae, JBK being out ahead of Mel.
- 34:00 Mel: No, there's definitely a sequence, yeah, to the way it unfolds, but it just, it's, as I said, it happened very, very fast, but certainly it's confusion [JBK: Mm-hmm.] and then like annoyance di- like disa- like hnn frustration, like. Yeah, I think there's like confusion and then like disappointment slash annoyed and then frustration. I think that sort of, that definitely is how that unfolded in that order. But that happens [claps hands] like that.
- 34:00 Russ comments: Jangle: We are now accepting a particular sequence that takes place in a finger snap or hand clap. I think it is likely (or at least possibly) a theory rather than an apprehension.
- Julian comments: I agree now (a few weeks later) with your jangles, Russ. I want to note this part because I mention it later in the interview. I say that Mel was confident so I became more confident. It's true that she does use words like "definitely" (twice). But I think I was too caught up in these. E.g., "I think that sort of, that definitely is how that unfolded in that order." To just focus on the "definitely" is to ignore the subjunctification – "I think", "sort of". *Definitely* doesn't have one meaning, just like "literally" "obviously". I think even depending on the context, it can mean its opposite.
- 34:35 JBK: Mm-hmm. So like, [snaps fingers] like
- 34:38 Mel: Yeah,
- 34:39 JBK: Like, um, like from beginning to end, kind of like [Mel: A flash.] can you tap out like when it might start and when it might end or something? [snaps fingers]
- 34:48 Mel: It's quicker than I can show you it happened.

- 34:52 JBK: Oh. So like [two claps, right after the other]
- 34:54 Mel: Like, like one clap gives you the whole thing unfolding.
- 34:57 JBK: Okay, one clap. One clap gives the whole thing unfolding. Is that, um... is that, do you think in the sense like psych- like, [Mel: Hmm] Maybe I don't need to ask that question. I was gonna ask if experientially, it feels like one clap, but in real life it might take longer, but maybe all we have at this moment is your experience, so
- 35:29 Mel: Yeah, it just hap- it, I really think it does happen really quickly. Like if I stop and reflect on my inner experience, then I can tell you, I think I definitely went through that, that, that. But at the time, it's, no, I definitely do think it is experienced [JBK: Mm-hmm] relatively instantaneously. [JBK: Yeah.] I'm only being able to break down the way it unfolded now, after the fact. But during the fact that all happened so fast that I wouldn't have been able to say like, *oh, and now it's progressed to frustration*, like that happens so fast.
- 36:09 JBK: So, so it's relatively instantaneously, but there's still a progression over time. [Mel: Yeah.] Is there a progression over time, as in like a very fast di-di-di- [noise like a flutter] like, like very fast? Or is it just it *is* instantaneous, but still *feels like* a progression?
- 36:31 Mel: Yeah, I'm hearing what you're saying. No. Yeah yeah, okay fine. Semantics, but yes. The, the other of like really fast progression.
- 36:38 JBK: Okay. Really fast progression.
- 36:41 Mel: When you did the br-r-bl noise. That [laughs]
- 36:41 Russ comments: There has been nothing since the last jangles to calm my antennae. I still think it likely (or at least possible) that JBK and Mel are conflating experience and theory, and that they (it's really JBK's responsibility) have not taken adequate (or any) precautions to keep those avenues separate.
- 36:46 JBK: [Laughs] Okay. Um, the, the disappointment annoyance, is that like disappointment in yourself annoyed at your- or at someone else? Or is the *at someone* not part of it?
- 37:02 Mel: Um, I, yeah, I would say equal parts myself and equal parts stupid computer, why is this not doing what I want it to do?
- 37:11 JBK: Okay. Um, would you be able to say how any of these emotions changed from one to the next? Or
- 37:23 Mel: In terms of, um, severity or like how I *felt* beyond just using those words?
- 37:35 JBK: Mm-hmm. Um... I kind of mean like if it's confusion and then disappointment, annoyance, is it like first one and then all at once the other? Or maybe [Mel: Mm-hmm.] confusion, like kind of gradually changes and then like disappointment or like, I

dunno, those are just two possibilities, but it doesn't have to be that. Or maybe you don't know.

37:59 Mel: I think it all happens too fast for me to be able to make too much of a distinction, um, beyond sort of what I've said. Like, I think then I risk [JBK: Mm-hmm] dialing in too much.

38:13 JBK: Yeah. And as a, as a fact of the universe, your eyeballs are looking at the screen. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Is, is that part of your experience at this moment?

38:26 Mel: Yes, actually that's something that I've glossed over by being so focused on the emotion. That yes, compared to previous beeps, the contents of the laptop is *very much* part of my awareness. Like I'm, my eyes are physically looking, but I'm like *really* looking at like, uh, yeah, hang on, why are these lines not lining up? So it's *very much* part of my awareness, but the emotions are the overwhelming sensation. But they're directly correlated with the contents on my laptop screen.

38:58 JBK: Yeah. So, so it's lines that are, that are not like, or could you describe the lines? Maybe like, are they horizontal or vertical or they're supposed to, like,

38:58 Russ comments: Jangle: This is a question about the computer screen, not experience, and likely will confuse any subsequent discussion about what is seen/experienced.

39:12 Mel: There's like two columns that had lines like this and they were supposed to be matching columns, but they were like this. [Her hands and fingers gesture to show two columns that are supposed to line up but aren't.]

39:21 JBK: Okay.

39:22 Mel: And I couldn't work out why the formatting was off when the text was the same size. [gestures continue]

39:28 JBK: Um, is there a *why are the lines not lining up* kind of thought? Or no? Or that's kind of part of the confusion? Or, or is that just ways of describing confusion?

39:43 Mel: Yeah, that's like, that is the source of the confusion. But in, that's not a distinct thought that's happening inside my brain [JBK: Okay.] at the time. No. It's just the overwhelming *feeling* of confusion and stuff, [JBK: Mm-hmm.] as a reaction to that on the screen. But I'm not consciously asking myself *why are these not lining up?*

40:08 JBK: For the looking part, is, are you looking specifically at anything? Specifically at the lines? Or is it a broader taking in of the whole screen? Or...?

40:18 Mel: No, at this point I'm like really engaged with just the specific sort of lines that I've described to you. Yeah.

40:18 Russ comments: Jangle: This is very much more specific than Mel's initial report, where she had written "I just noticed something wrong,..." and then focused the

description on the ensuing emotion. Mel is smart and articulate, and could have written “I was looking at the lines that didn’t align...” So should we credit Mel’s original writing, which was (perhaps intentionally) nonspecific (because the center of her focus was on the feeling)? Or should we credit the subsequent conversation, which was very specific “really engaged with just the specific sort of lines that I’ve described to you”? I’m no mind reader, so I don’t know. But as I said at 32:18: Rule of thumb: the more logical the process, the *less* likely it was experienced, because the more likely it is a self-theory.

- 40:27 JBK: Okay. So, so what I have is you’re on your computer looking at your website redesign. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] The lines aren’t lining up, and you’re visually focused on that part. The line’s not lining up. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] That is part of your experience, not just fringes. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, and you also have a strong emotion and that it’s, it’s very present. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Um, and it’s, it cycles very quickly through, through different aspects of confusion and then a kind of a disappointment, annoyance and frustration. Um, and it’s negative. It’s very fast, like pr-r-r almost [claps his hands] instantaneous. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] basically instantaneous. And yeah, it’s strong, negative you, you’re overcome by it. Um, d- does that, do you think I missed anything? Or does that...?
- 41:27 Mel: No, I feel like that sums it up.
- 41:38 JBK: Questions, Russ?
- 41:35 RTH: So can I ask some questions here? The, so I’m, I’m gathering, there’s sort of two aspects of my experience. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] There’s the seeing and there’s the emotion.
- 41:45 Mel: Mm-hmm.
- 41:48 RTH: And does it make sense to ask, does, as far as my experience is concerned, which of those is more stronger for me? Which is more salient?
- 41:56 Mel: Yes. It does make sense to ask that. And the emotions are definitely stronger.
- 42:01 RTH: 60—40? 90—10? 99—1? [shrugs]
- 42:07 Mel: Prb-b-b um... [pause] like the reason I’m hesitating here is because the emotions are just, are just like intrinsically linked to the contents of the laptop. So finding a little bit hard, but
- 42:28 RTH: That, that’s, that’s what I’m trying to get at actually. So I understand that the laptop has disappointed you or [Mel: Yes.] whatever it is, what- whatever this emotion is gonna be.
- 42:38 Mel: Yeah.

- 42:39 RTH: But the, but my question is something like: At the moment of this particular beep, [Mel: Mmm] are you still engaged in a visual mode? Or is your engagement I'm more feeling (whatever the words were) confused, annoyed, whatever.
- 43:01 Mel: Like, yeah. Actually it's funny, isn't it? Cuz now I'm... like, I can't, the, the obvious initial response I wanna give is the emotions were the really clear thing. But the emotions are actually directly linked with me really taking in the laptop. So I wanted to be like, oh, 70—30. But actually I think it's probably [laughs] more like fif- like it's, cuz it's sort of one and the same, isn't it?
- 43:32 RTH: And, and I'm gathering that the emotions are not experienced bodily. Is that right? [Mel: No. (shakes head definitively)] I don't, I don't feel it in my fists or my heart or my forehead or whatever.
- 43:47 Mel: No, not on this case.
- 43:48 RTH: And I use the term *mental* for that. But just because, but by *mental*, I mean *not bodily*.
- 43:53 Mel: Yep.
- 43:54 RTH: So this, this emotions are experienced mentally.
- 43:57 Mel: Yep. I'm happy with that.
- 44:06 RTH: And then I think I, I think I'm good. But I would, I would say I didn't believe any of the stuff about things unfolding as being descriptions of experience. I thought that was context, explanation, whatever, that was beyond what she could say. And I think she gave quite a few hints as to why that was the case: that it happened at the speed of a hand clap; and we're trying to parse out four or five different phases [laughs] going through the speed of a hand clap, which I don't think is possible. So I, I, I thought, think, that it's fair to say that there was emotion, possibly the same strength or stronger than the, than the visual explanation. But I think it, I think it would, would it's beyond, beyond what we could confidently say Mel experienced at the moment of the beep to say that there was some di-di-di feature [Mel: Mm-hmm] of that emotion.

44:06 Russ comments: The question is whether (a) the DES process has discovered that a main aspect of Mel's 6:36 pm experience is a confused/disappointed/annoyed feeling that is triggered by noticing something wrong with her screen, or (b) the DES process has discovered that a main aspect of her 6:36 pm experience is a rapidly unfolding feeling sequence that begins with confusion and is rapidly transformed into disappointment and annoyance that is the result of a simultaneous noticing that the lines on the computer screen do not align correctly.

Option (b) is substantially more specific than option (a), and the question is whether that specificity is warranted or is the result of interactions between JBK and Mel that inject theoretically reasonable and/or otherwise fascinating detail into the discussion and then leads them to believe that those details are recalled rather than injected. I'm not a mind reader, so I don't know, but there's lots of false memory research (think Loftus) that should make us at least a little worried.

The general DES principle, as it seems to me, is that when an interesting/fascinating detail occurs fairly far into the interview (here, the interview started at 26:45 and the first mention of something like a sequence was at 31:34, five minutes in), and/or when there have been infelicities in the interview process (leading questions, etc.), then that interesting/fascinating detail should serve as the beginning of an iterative process aimed at subsequent sampling, but *not* as an accepted feature of the present sample. This is particularly true when both the interviewer and the participant seem interested/fascinated—there is just too much opportunity for an unwitting collusive creation of false memory.

Julian comments: I agree that there was at least some collusive over-articulation here. I think it's not possible to untangle how much. And, Russ, I agree with your following point that rather than trying to figure out how much, I should have turned it into an opportunity for iterative learning.

45:15 JBK: Hmm. But you, what, what do you think about that, Mel? Do you think it's a stretch to say that? Or do you think that for you, um, for you, there is some, some of these distinctions you can make?

45:15 Russ comments: Jangle: This is not possibly a good question. If it is *not* a stretch, then Mel will say "No" (because she has an accurate, not stretchy, recollection). If it *is* a stretch, then Mel will say "No" (because the stretch implies that there has been a collusive false-memory creation, as RTH 44:06 suspects). If she is trying to please one or both of us, then she will say something to please, not a description of experience.

I'm no mind reader, but any attempt to defend what might be a false memory is delusional. Even if you're right in this particular instance, you have no warrant to defend yourself about this particular instance, because one never can confidently determine whether any particular belief is a delusion. DES is a battle against delusion, and collusion is a joint delusion. This sample is water over the dam, either memory or false memory, with no way to figure it out. Any further attempt is a digging deeper, not a bracketing. One can make it worse (as I think the question does), but one can't make it better.

If there is a way out of delusion, it is *not* to try to figure out any one instance. The only possible way out is to develop over time, into the future, a set of skills and proclivities that make delusion less likely. The kinds of things I have in mind (although I cannot be said, and don't claim, to be an expert): cultivate a desire for and openness to well-meaning skeptics to criticize you; invite skeptics to co-interview; practice being straightforwardly open about all skepticism; cultivate a genuine desire to discover yourself as wrong rather than right; cultivate a taste for recognizing your own limitations; cultivate an acceptance that the only hope is the iterative method, and that that is no guarantee.

So at 45:15, JBK had the opportunity (which he missed) to acknowledge that we may have discovered an interesting phenomenon—di-di-di sequence of feelings—but we may have muddled the water. We don't know, and there is no possible way to know about this sample. But possibly our discussion today will help us in the future.

Jangle: Perhaps relatedly, JBK's 45:15 question reminds me (correctly or incorrectly) of the Julian-as-a-competitor-with-Russ conversation from day 9. I would note that if the conversation on day 9 was correct, then Julian-as-a-competitor-with-

Russ phenomenon *must* occur again and again, because (as Freud and others have observed) insight is never enough—things that are rooted in delusion require work and practice, work and practice, work and practice.

45:27 Mel: Yeah, I feel, I definitely feel like it's, it's getting dangerously difficult, but I do think that I stand by being able to differentiate the confusion and *then* the negatives. So I think there, I, I'm satisfied with some element of what we discussed, Julian, of like, I think there is a distinction there, but then... yeah, once you get into like, trying to nail down how fast that happens or like, yeah, exactly. I think that's when it gets d-, muddy. But there was a distinction that could be made, and I think it happens about this fast, [makes broad circular gestures] I think *that* you can take.

46:14 JBK: Okay. Um, I'm kind of surprised you say that, Russ, because in some of your samples with other people, there are all kinds of different elements at once, or I think I also remember some samples of like really fast cycles of emotions and maybe research on depression, but, um,

46:35 RTH: Well, I'd be happy to take a look at those with you if you want and figure out one. Here, this one. I, I just, it was, it was too fast and I thought, I thought that the, I thought that the ability, I... It, it is no doubt true that the emotion cycles from confusion to annoyance. I'm guessing that's really true. Whether that's in Mel's experience is another story. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] And whether it's in her experience at the moment of this beep is another story. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]

46:35 Julian comments: As you say Russ, Mel's experience may be completely different. But I think the research I was referring to was with bipolar disorder. Not your research, but in one of your supervisee's. Specifically Johannah Kang's 2015 dissertation *Examining the Inner Experience of Individuals with Bipolar Disorder*. In sample 4.4, Jessica has a rapid succession of seven inner seeings (141). However, I was mistaken and this is a quick succession of inner seeings and not feelings. I may have also been combining recollection of this with recollection of your research on bulimia, where people had multiple elements simultaneously. Although usually simultaneity was more the case here than succession. I see looking through in other research you've supervised that other people can have rapid cycles. But from what I see, these are of images and thoughts (e.g. Jewel 2.5 in Kang's 2013 MS thesis, p 79). I didn't find an instance of feelings.

Again, these don't matter so much because Mel is Mel. Because of this research, I may have been more likely to accept Mel's accounts and slower to drag my feet. I think it's ok to be open to the idea of rapid cycles. That's not the fault in itself. But questioning has to be unbiassing along the way. My turn at 31:19 I think was the main culprit. I note that Mel used a lot of words and asked if any of them feels closer to her experience. She talked about a sequence of emotions right after this, and we stayed on that path for a while.

Russ comments: In watching this interview a couple of months later, and trying to recall/reconstruct what was happening with RTH during the interview (the reader should take all such reconstructive processes, including mine, with a huge grain of salt), I think RTH's turns at 44:06 and 46:35 are problematic. I agree with the RTH of

44:06 where he said “I didn’t believe any of the stuff about things unfolding as being descriptions of experience.” But his explanation focused on the rapidity of the timing, which I think is a warped explanation. I think RTH’s reason for not believing had much more to do with the infelicities of the questioning (all the jangling) than with the timing issues. I think that had RTH thought that the questioning was good, and it had ended up with rapid sequencing, he would have been happy to accept the rapidity.

I’m no mind reader, including of RTH’s mind, but I suspect that RTH at 44:06 was avoiding being straightforwardly critical of JBK’s questioning because being critical is interpersonally difficult and risky. RTH had already been quite confrontational (saying “I didn’t believe any of the stuff”), and I suspect he was trying to soften that by pointing to the results rather than the questions. But Julian’s comment at 46:35 demonstrates that his attempt was unfortunate— RTH’s attempt at softening took Julian down the wrong path.

47:14 JBK: Mm-hmm.

47:16 RTH: But I, y’know, it would depend on how, how that’s characterized as whether I would.... It’s in the weeds, I would say, between somewhere in here there was probably annoyance and there was probably confusion and there was probably emotion. But to try to s-, to try to get at with some sequence, I think is Mel’s self-theory, not direct experience at the moment of the beep.

47:44 Mel: Mm-hmm.

47:48 JBK: So Mel, do you, do you think like we could say that there’s confusion, then there’s a bunch of other negatives, maybe some frustration, disappointmen-? So, so what do you think we could say about your experience, Mel? That there is kind of, it’s not static, there is kind of a, a shift, like a, like it’s changing—these negative emotions. Do, do you think we can say that at least?

47:48 Russ comments: What I said at 45:15 applies here as well.

48:16 Mel: But it i- I, it happens so fast that that’s my hesitation, that beyond sort of what I’ve been able to say, like I think there’s a distinction between confusion and that then, like I don’t, it don’t necessarily see it as this, like, um, it, it’s not easy to describe this changing state or it’s not like clearly—it get feels muddy, yeah for sure. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] Um, yeah, I’m hesitant to unpack that too much because it just feels like how it feels. It’s, it would be different if, y’know, over the course of 10 minutes I went through all these different feelings that I, you could clearly grab at. This happened so quickly and we’re talking about a bunch of emotions that’s fairly similar. So I have reservations [JBK: Okay.] about getting too specific.

49:16 JBK: But you did seem more, more confident that confusion started it and that other things unfolded. [Mel: Yeah.] Would you... And, and Russ, would you kind of agree to that? Or would you say that even that is maybe too risky to...?

49:16 Russ comments: What I said at 45:15 applies here as well.

- 49:34 RTH: I think that, uh, there, there's nothing that Mel could say at this particular moment, this far down the road, about this particular sample, for me to *think* that at the moment of this beep, there was an experience that started as confusion and became something else, became an annoyance or whatever, and *that* was captured at the moment of the beep.
- 49:34 Russ comments: The heart of the difference, and essential to DES (as it seems to me): JBK would like to be right, whereas RTH would like to stay in the realm of *I don't know* until there isn't room left for not knowing. This is not a particular criticism of JBK for two reasons: I might be wrong or partially wrong about what I said JBK would like; and because nearly all psychology / philosophy is in the I'd-like-to-be-right camp.
- 49:57 Mel: Mm-hmm.
- 49:58 RTH: And, and that doesn't mean that, that doesn't mean that that experience doesn't happen that way. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] [JBK: Mm hmm.] It may very well happen that way. I just don't think we have any evidence *from DES* about that. And, and I would like us to keep separate what we have evidence that we can point to and say, well this is, this is why we think that. And, and *my* evaluation of this is that goes beyond what we can say. But there's more like-, or, or it *is* likely it is *possible* (likely whatever; I dunno) that the ex- the explanation, the self-theory about how it happens is at least as important as the experience at the moment of the beep. And that's not a criticism of Mel. That's, that's just...
- 50:50 JBK: Yeah.
- 50:51 RTH: What I, what I *wouldn't* want us to be doing would be to get at the end and we say, "Look what we found here! We did a DES beep and we found a *sequence* of *first* confusion and *then* annoyance and *then...*", which I just don't think we have the warrant to say. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] I think we have the warrant- I think we *do* have warrant to say, I mean, "she was annoyed, confused whatever. And at the moment, in this particular beep, [Mel: Mm-hmm.] and that, that was mental rather than bodily." I think we have *warrant* for that. I would, I would go to the mat about those. Then that that's, but about whether we have, whether we can parse something more, finer than that, I just have my doubts about it. [Mel: Mm-hmm.]
- 51:40 JBK: I would say a little bit more in that I think we do have, we do see something that's not static. It's not just one thing, it is there, it doesn't change. I think Mel was confident that there was this, this kind of shifting part of it, like a cha- change.
- 52:02 Mel: Evolution. I would say it evolved.
- 52:07 JBK: And it's also because like I, I'm not like combating your doubts. Sometimes, y'know, during the interview I was like, can we really distinguish, y'know, so fast four different emotions, but, um, yeah. Mel, you, you didn't seem so hesitant about it. Like there, there wasn't so much subjunctification as we say in DES, like filler words or, um, I dunno, like, um, you, you seem pretty confident, but, so, so Russ, what makes you think, I mean, what, what, what made you so skeptical?

- 52:07 Julian comments: See my comment at 34:00 about this.
- 52:42 RTH: What would it be, if, if we wanted to, we could rewind the tape and I could, and I could say why my context detectors, my self-theory detectors, jangled at this point and not that point or whatever.
- 52:42 Russ comments: My “jangle” comments above are the result of this (see the comment at 30:46).
- 52:59 JBK: We probably will at some point.
- 53:00 RTH: And I don’t think I, I don’t think I can, I can do it, I could say that without going back and looking. And, and I don’t mean to imply that my context detectors are a hundred percent accurate. I don’t think they are. [pause]
- 53:20 [pause] I, I think, I guess, I think the science is best served, the understanding is best served, the, the interpersonal relationship between me *and Mel* I think are best served by being a little conservative. Which is to say I’m, I, I *don’t* want us to engage in sort of a, what I would call a collusive over-articulation, because sooner or later Mel is going to know, well, we were engaged in that collusive over inter-, articulation there, and then she’s not gonna trust me or you or anybody else after that. And, uh, so I think it’s better to be a little foot-draggy.
- 53:20 Julian comments: “she’s not gonna trust me or you or anybody else after that.”—or importantly herself.
- 54:09 JBK: Okay.
- 54:09 RTH: Because I, I think, I think Mel, [pause] well, I, I, I think that’s how you, how you, how one establishes credibility. I guess.
- 54:24 JBK: It’s interesting that you talk of being skeptical as like *enhancing* trust.
- 54:30 RTH: *Absolutely!* Skepticism is enhancing trust! 100 percent! And that’s almost always thought of backwards from that, in the rest of psychology. [JBK: Mm-hmm.] [Mel: Mmm.] And the, and the, and the, and the reason for that is that most people when they use “skeptical,” *they* mean, “I don’t believe you, but I’m not gonna tell ya.” [Mel: Hmm.] That means when *most* people use the word skeptical, they’re lying to you, to your face. And when *I* use *skeptical*, I’m saying, *I’d like to know. But I don’t. And I’m trying, I’m trying my best to get at what, what you’ve got. And I’m trying to be honest with you about why it is that I doubt what it is that you’re saying.* And I think that is the heart of [Mel: Mmm.] trust and.... But it, but it, but it’s not the, it’s not the heart of psychology, I don’t think, or philosophy or whatever.
- 54:30 Russ comments: These last few minutes have been an important discussion that lies at the heart of DES. I think Mel’s body/mind/brain (whatever you want to call the whole of Mel) has some access to Mel’s experience—not perfect access, by any means, but sort of like a magnetic compass has access to the north star. The needle wants to

point north, and will point north if given the chance, but there's lots of things that can disturb its north-pointing (ferrous stuff, tilt, calibration, etc.). Her body/mind/brain gives hints when it is being nudged off course (that's what I call subjunctification—her grammar producer resisting the nudge), but there are forces on Mel other than her desire to describe her inner experience: self-presentation, desire to please JBK and/or Russ, etc.

Some would think that the art of DES is trying to separate out those aspects of what Mel says, and respond only to the inner-experience part. I think that is impossible, and to try to do so is misguided. The art is, over time, to try to get us all in a position where the competing forces have become reduced—a position where Mel is more able to focus on her experience than anything else, because the interviewers have become more interested in her experience than in being right, or in being smart, or in winning. In short, DES is about accepting ignorance, and trying to get in a place where the delusional attempt to hide/overcome ignorance has less and less of a grip.

I re-emphasize that this is not a personal criticism of JBK (or Mel); it is the human condition.

Julian comments: To bring the human condition into this, I found this discussion here essential. And not just for DES. Of course a main goal of this project is to be a better interviewer. But I found the lesson here useful for 'real life' interactions.

I've found myself more meaningfully open to the world and to other people over the course of this process. Russ, you've talked about how sometimes participating as a DES interviewee can greatly benefit people's mental state. I think interviewing has benefitted me.

I'm not sure what to do with this information. Going into interviewing thinking of it as self-help risks distorting it. The point is to keep the focus on Mel's experience.

Touting DES as some miracle cure risks over selling it. Of course I think many more people should be practicing it or something similar, and could gain a lot from it.

For now I'll just say that I'm grateful for lessons like the one above.

55:32 Mel: Hmm.

55:33 JBK: Alright.

55:34 Mel: Interesting.

55:36 JBK: Mm-hmm.

55:37 Mel: Um

NOTE: At the end of this transcript there is a [discussion occasioned by the writing the description of sample 10.3](#).

5:38 RTH: Number 4?

55:39 JBK: Number 4.

SAMPLE 10.4 DISCUSSION STARTS HERE

55:39 Mel: Yeah. I've got, this went off at 7:50 PM I was literally mid yelling the phrase, [laughs] "why is that doing that?!" as the beep went off. [phone or computer beeps] Um, right before it, I felt frustration at noticing another problem on my design. Uh, similar to the above. It was an immediate visceral response: I saw, I reacted, et cetera. There was no meta thought about it.

56:16 RTH: So let's focus on this beep first. So there is a, this is *yelling*.

56:22 Mel: Yes. [laughs]

56:23 RTH: And, and that could be understood as a fact-of-the-*universe*-I'm-yelling and it could be understood as a fact of *experience*: I, I experienced myself as yelling. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Why is it doing that? [Mel: Mm-hmm.] So is this a, is this an experiential thing or just something that's coming outta your mouth? And the, and the, the, the distinction I'm trying to make there is, y'know, you just adjusted your glasses and that came out of your hand, but you probably didn't even notice that you adjusted your glasses. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] It, it comes out of you. And the question is whether the yelling is just coming out of you or whether this is an experienced process.

56:23 Julian comments: The adjusted your glasses comment is an interesting way to do it. Russ, normally you go with the backside-in-chair example because that's most readily accessible. The glasses is a way to switch it up to illustrate the concept of background processing. Participants might itch themselves or twirl their hair and so on—so I could note something like that if I'm observant.

Russ comments:

RE "normally...switch it up"

To my ear, that makes it too much about the words, as if I have a backside script that I invoke in certain circumstances. You're right, I often use a backside-in-chair example because it's accessible. My interest is in Mel's experience as it is experienced, and in as real-life real-time understanding of it as I can get, so I would prefer to compare two as-close-to-the-present instances as I can get.

57:08 Mel: [pause] I don't know. I'm, cuz I can appreciate that I do that [adjusts her glasses] and don't notice. But like... I find the same, I'm, I'm not, I, I struggle with the same distinction for the yelling.

57:31 RTH: So is, is that to say it, well, I experienced myself as yelling. There's no possible way that I could yell and not experience myself as yelling? [Mel: I think so.] Which is fine with me. I'm not, I'm, I, I, I, I just wanted to give you the opportunity of saying, y'know, now that I think about it, there was really no experience there. But [Mel: Yeah.] But that's *not* what you're saying. I'm, I'm experience. I'm understanding you to be saying "I was experiencing yelling."

57:55 Mel: Yep. Yeah. I think I, yeah. Yep. I was.

57:59 RTH: Okay. *And* at the same time, I am feeling of what you called a “visceral response” that is something like frustration.

58:08 Mel: Mm-hmm.

58:10 RTH: And I would like to know whether this is a bodily thing or a mental thing or...?

58:16 Mel: Both. I feel like this, compared to the previous beep, this did feel a little more bodily, I would say, because the frustration is getting more intense. Um, so I think like, which is relevant to like the yelling. And so I feel like this was felt bodily a bit at this point. There’s a bit of this [gestures gripping? with hands] happening.

58:40 RTH: And, [coughs] and what is that that you’re describing?

58:44 Mel: Um, a tensing, I suppose. Um, whether at the moment of the beep I had physically tensed my fists yet, I don’t think so. But like, I think there was tensing throughout the act of yelling. There was definitely, yeah, like a bodily release related to the frustration that wasn’t present in the beep prior as well.

59:09 RTH: So am I feeling bodily tense, tension at the moment of the beep? Or am I *surmising* that since I’m yelling I must be tense?

59:20 Mel: Mm, good question. N- I think, no, I think there was, it was experienced, but it’s not like the main part of my experience. Like the mental frustration is definitely the main part. But I think there was a bodily experience of it.

59:36 RTH: Okay. And, and in the, in the bodily portion of it, [Mel: Mm-hmm] is, is there a portion of the body that is involved? This is my shoulders, chest, fists, legs, none of the above, all of the above, can’t tell.

59:51 Mel: Mm. Yeah. I think I’m, I’m gonna be hypothesizing if I give you anything there.

59:57 RTH: Mm-hmm. So it’s not like I’m specifically noticing my upper body to be tense, but it does seem like I’m somehow noticing the bodily aspect of this. Is that fair?

1:00:08 Mel: Yeah. That. Yeah. That like, particularly compared to the previous beep, like there’s a bodily element *here* that wasn’t *there*. [pause] Yeah.

1:00:22 RTH: So that sentence, what you just uttered, [Mel: Mm-hmm] could be taken as a mere physical explanation: There was a bodily thing present that wasn’t there before. And the reason for that is that I’m yellin’ now and I wasn’t yellin’ before. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Or it could be taken as well. I’m experiencing something bodily. Or I’m just not sure about this. Maybe it’s just that Russ is asking me stuff that is not, that I’m not capable of differentiating.

1:00:55 Mel: Um,

1:00:58 RTH: And I didn't mean *capable* as being [Mel: No, I know.] um, some judgmental thing.

1:01:03 Mel: [laughs] No, I didn't interpret it that way. Um, no, I'm just trying to remember. Um, no, there were, there was,

1:01:17 Mel: Because in the act of yelling there was a physical sensation as well. [coughs] Sorry. Um, so like, I'm looking at my laptop [inaudible] and I said, y'know, whatever I said of like, "Why is that doing that?!?" or whatever. So I, there is this, my body has sort of tensed up or... Yeah. I, I think *tensed up* is sort of a right description that *with* the yelling, there's a physical element that's not just my voice, but where that is felt is sort of, y'know, it's just *felt*, it's not specifically my hands tensed and I know that happened or I felt that—it's not *that*. But there was a bodily tensing as I yelled. And the, I would say that feeling of frustration that *was* mental was also felt in a bodily, somewhat physical way. Yeah.

1:02:22 RTH: And, and the feeling, how is that the same or different from the feeling of the previous beep?

1:02:29 Mel: Because by this point it ha- it the con- that the confusion part was far less, and this was really a just built-up frustration due to the repetition of annoying issues. Um, so like, whereas earlier it was like, oh, why? Like, there was a confusion and then there was like, this is annoying and this is frustrating, this is disappointing. I think by this beep, that first half is not happening, even though that happens really quick. That was not present at all here. This is just anger / frustration, just...

1:03:07 RTH: Okay.

1:03:10 Mel: Um, and I would, I would also say, yeah, it's felt with more intensity, which is, [RTH: Okay] yeah, I mean, I'm gonna hypothesize, but I was gonna say that's also why I think that was the physical element.

1:03:10 Russ comments: I think there is some reason to wonder whether the bodily aspect is felt as a bodily aspect or is more implied by the intensity. That may be an in-the-weeds distinction that is not possible to discriminate.

1:03:36 RTH: And, and what exactly were you yelling?

1:03:40 Mel: "Why is that doing that?!?" [laughs]

1:03:43 RTH: And, and is, are you confident that those are the exact words?

1:03:47 Mel: Yeah, I've written down that exact phrase. [RTH: Okay.] Yeah.

1:03:53 RTH: So, and, and, and are those words in, salient to you, or is that just sort of an expression of "what the fuck?!?"

1:04:06 Mel: Uh, how, um, what do you mean?

- 1:04:15 RTH: I guess what I'm trying to get at is whether this, whether this is a semantically meaningful question, *why is it doing that?* [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Or whether this is a, an expression of frustration where the words don't really matter. I don't want an answer to this question. I wanna, I want to express annoyance.
- 1:04:34 Mel: No, I think I want an answer to this question. I think the phrase would've been worse if I just wanted to express frustration. So this is a frustrated question. I am looking at my laptop, looking at the specific things that are annoying me going, why is *that* doing *that*? Um, so in a way it's a, it's a question to myself and the universe rather than a pissed-off release.
- 1:05:02 RTH: And, and five seconds ago you said, "why is that doing that?" [spoken emphatically with a hand exclamation at the main words] Is that what you mean by *yelling*? Or, or was yelling louder, more intense, whatever than that?
- 1:05:13 Mel: [laughs] true. I guess. Yeah. I wasn't like screaming to the hills. It was probably a bit louder than what I just did, but it's not, yeah.
- 1:05:23 RTH: But in a ballpark of, but in a ballpark of that?
- 1:05:26 Mel: But yeah, exa- of like my mom would've heard it down the hallway in the kitchen, but the next-door neighbors definitely did not hear it. [laughs]
- 1:05:34 RTH: Okay. All right then. I think I'm good.
- 1:05:37 JBK: Um, at, at some point there was some mention of like the, a release of this tension with the yelling, but I, that was just mentioned once or maybe I misheard it. Um, was that part of it or not?
- 1:05:54 Mel: Yeah, sorry. I think I mean there, um, more like, um, the emotion manifesting itself physically is probably a better description rather than like *release*. I think maybe I led you up a garden path by saying *release* there. I would say it's
- 1:06:12 JBK: Okay. So the yelling is the physical, y'know, the motion come coming out or, but it's not like the, it's not like tension like lessens or,
- 1:06:25 Mel: Or no, it's not like tension lessens at all. If anything, it's quite the opposite. Um, the emotion is felt more *intensely* because that emotion is now, now has a bodily aspect to it that is not. It's not released, it's continued, if that makes any sense.
- 1:06:50 JBK: When you say like, quite the opposite, like do you think like there's a, a change over this moment of some kind with your emotions?
- 1:07:04 Mel: No. At the, at the moment of the beep, this was just very clearly just like, yeah, the only li- word that I wrote down really that describes the emotional state was *frustration*. So this was very intensely *that* feeling. And that, yeah, as I said before, there wasn't like, yeah, some element of confusion or then like this. This was *frustration*. But

- 1:07:30 JBK: I mean changes in like this frustration increasing over this moment or something, or
- 1:07:36 Mel: No, I don't think so.
- 1:07:40 JBK: Um, and you, so you're, you're yelling "Why is that doing that?" and that is experiential, it's not just, y'know, something that's happening. Um, is that about *hearing* it? Or vocally *producing* it? Or like a mix of both?
- 1:08:00 Mel: Um, I wouldn't say like vocally producing it is necessarily in my awareness. I'd say more hearing [spoken unsurely] it is in my awareness, like vocally producing it is just a fact rather than anything I've experienced *per se*.
- 1:08:20 JBK: Mm-hmm. Between the, the yelling and this frustration / anger, um, feeling, which, uh, would you be able to give percentages to, to how present they are in your experience?
- 1:08:42 Mel: Well, again, I feel like same with the earlier one, this, they're intrinsically linked. So actually when I wanna say one is experienced more than the other, I think it's all so *intertwined* because it was reactionary. Um, so like I'm, I'm f- mentally feeling that emotion, which is leading to the yelling. And so I find it hard to differentiate, cuz it's sort of all experienced as one package.
- 1:09:14 JBK: It's all part of one, one thing and it doesn't even make sense to say there was this yelling part. [Mel: Yeah.] And then there was this frustration part there.
- 1:09:22 Mel: Yeah. It's, it's all a package at that moment.
- 1:09:27 JBK: Okay. Um, I'm good on questions.

1:09:27 Russ comments: After sampling, Julian wrote this description:

10.4 I am frustratedly yelling (aloud) "why is that doing that!" about the website screwing up (this is loud emphatic speaking rather than screaming). Not separate from the yelling is a strong feeling of frustration, mostly mental except perhaps an experience of tension in my body (not in any one specific area that I can pin down).

Exercise for the reader:

That description incorporates two nounifications/thingifications : "the yelling" is a thing, nounified from the verb "am yelling"; and "the feeling of frustration" is a thing, nounified from the verb "am feeling frustrated." Rewrite the description avoiding those nounifications/thingifications and pull those threads through the remainder of the description, simplifying/clarifying it.

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Giving you time/space to write your answer to the exercise for the reader.

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Exercise for the reader (restatement): After sampling, Julian wrote this description:

10.4 I am frustratedly yelling (aloud) “why is that doing that!” about the website screwing up (this is loud emphatic speaking rather than screaming). Not separate from the yelling is a strong feeling of frustration, mostly mental except perhaps an experience of tension in my body (not in any one specific area that I can pin down).

That description incorporates two nounifications/thingifications : “the yelling” is a thing, nounified from the verb “am yelling”; and “the feeling of frustration” is a thing, nounified from the verb “am feeling frustrated.” Rewrite the description avoiding those nounifications/thingifications and pull those threads through the remainder of the description, simplifying/clarifying it.

Russ’s answer: The nounifications / thingifications make the yelling and the feeling separate things; the original description says “not separate from the yelling,” but that is like trying to wind two separate strands back together. So I would write:

10.4 I am frustratedly yelling (aloud) “why is that doing that!” about the website screwing up (this is loud emphatic speaking rather than screaming) and feeling frustrated, mostly mentally except perhaps experiencing tension in my body (not in any one specific area that I can pin down).

This is a good example of why nounification/thingification is importantly problematic. When “am yelling” and “am feeling” remain verbs—actions—then the conjunction “and” in “I am ... yelling ... *and* feeling” can be used simply to imply coordinated action *without* implying any thing-like separation, which therefore avoids the necessity of trying to put them back together.

Julian comments: I came up with:

10.4 I am out-loud frustratedly yelling (or rather loudly speaking) “why is that doing that!” about the website screwing up. I also feel frustrated, and maybe tense in my body (not in any specific area that I can pin down).

Considerations: I had to get rid of “this” as a demonstrative pronoun. So the clarification of “loud, emphatic speaking rather than screaming” comes earlier.

I shortened this clarification. Maybe at first this was a stylistic choice, because I don’t like putting too many adjectives before what’s actually being described. Shortening does have another effect though. There’s a lighter touch to the distinction between loudly speaking and screaming. This made me wonder if this distinction was too constraining. Mel described it first as yelling. Though to an outside observer it would sound like loud speaking. Though with Mel’s feeling frustrated, maybe experientially it was stronger. Mel’s subjective experience might not line up with the “objective”/psychoacoustic description.

The other effect of getting rid of “this” was with the feeling-frustrated. I couldn’t talk about it being separate or not separate from the yelling without either nounifying it or the yelling in some way (by the way, I’m nounifying here, but just to illustrate). Maybe there’s a way to do it, but I didn’t come up with it.

I wonder if a focus on whether different processes are separate or not separate can impose arbitrary theoretical categories.

It’s funny, I’ve been corresponding with a consciousness scholar Błażej Skrzypulec who’s studying the unity or disunity of consciousness. And I’m telling him he’s coming at it with too many presuppositions. But maybe I do as well.

The other consideration was with “tension”. This was tough to denounify but eventually, I left it as an adjective to “feel”.

ARRANGEMENTS AFTER THE SAMPLING

1:09:33 RTH: Me too. We are an hour and nine minutes into this, according to...

1:09:38 JBK: Mm-hmm.

1:09:40 RTH: Do we wanna say that’s enough for today and come back sometime later?

1:09:47 JBK: Um, for me yes actually [laughs] I’m quite exhausted.

1:09:51 Mel: It’s late for you as well, Julian. So let’s do that.

1:09:54 JBK: Yeah. [laughs]

1:09:55 RTH: So should we pick a date and,

1:09:59 JBK: Uh, I’m willing...

1:10:01 RTH: Or do we wanna do it? Do we wanna do even that by email?

1:10:04 Mel: No, it is easier when we tend to do it now, but I just realized I don’t have my diary with me in this room. Um, but I should be pretty flexible next week so I can work around you guys basically, if you have a preference.

1:10:20 JBK: Should we do same time? And then I’m free any day next week.

1:10:26 RTH: So the same, the next week, a week from today would be February 19th, Monday, February 19th.

1:10:32 Mel: Yeah, it would be.

1:10:34 RTH: Which I can do.

1:10:37 JBK: Our 19th and Mel’s wait, 20th?

1:10:40 Mel: 20th,

1:10:41 RTH: Whatever is a week from today. Same time, same station. Does that work for everybody?

1:10:47 JBK: Yes. For me, yes.

1:10:51 Mel: Are you sure Julian? It felt like there was hesitation [laughs]

1:10:55 JBK: No, no, no, no. I'm just tired. [laughs] For me, yes.

1:10:58 Mel: Yes. Yeah, I'm pretty sure I can do that. Let me just triple confirm when I get my calendar in the other room eventually, but yeah, I'm sure that's fine. So same time, same place next week.

1:11:09 RTH: Okay. Let's, let's pencil, pencil that in and if anybody changes their mind for whatever reason [Mel: Yep.] then we'll change it.

COMMENTS ARISING DURING THE WRITING OF A DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE 10.3

The writing and revision of sample 10.3 had two strands of commentary. Here's the original description draft:

Julian writes: Sample 10.3: [I'm looking at my computer at a redesign for my website] I'm frustratedly noticing that two horizontal lines in adjacent paragraphs are not lining up. I'm visually focused on these lines. This comes with a very strong negative feeling of confusion/disappointment/annoyance/frustration. This feeling is not static, and changes over a very short, almost instantaneous period of time. (My impression is of it starting with confusion and then rapidly cycling through the other negatives. It does not have a felt bodily location. It's not possible to separate looking at the website from the negative feelings).

On the cyan strand about the lines

Russ comments:

RE "two horizontal lines in adjacent paragraphs are not lining up. I'm visually focused on these lines. This comes with a very strong negative feeling of confusion / disappointment / annoyance / frustration."

I think the focus on "two horizontal lines in adjacent paragraphs are not lining up" is more specific than is warranted, the result of questioning that conflated reality with experience. And I think that "this comes with" has an implication of causation. So I would write: "I have a strong negative feeling of confusion/disappointment/annoyance/frustration—there is something wrong with the document."

Julian comments: I don't think the thing with the paragraphs is really experienced as such. I would say (without going through the transcript yet):

[I'm looking at my computer at a redesign for my website. Two horizontal lines in adjacent paragraphs are not lining up.] I'm visually focused on these lines.

Still, I see it possible that you're right and I didn't get to that clearly. I think a mistake was early on asking about the physical reality of the website before asking how it was experienced. It should be the other way around. I made similar mistakes in the day 3 transcript that I just went over.

I'll wait until fully going over the transcript before I revise this sample.

RE "this comes with"

I wrote this not to imply causation but to stay true to Mel description of the visual and the feeling part not being separate. To me the "with" makes it simultaneous not causal. I don't have such strong feelings about leaving it in, though, but wanted to give my perspective.

Russ comments: I think the focus on the lines is not warranted. In my view, as soon as one asks for the details of the physical reality, the inquiry about experience is over with, kaput. In my recollection, Mel started out by saying that there was "something wrong" with the website. Then you asked about the details and she talked about lines not lining up on the website. Anything later about lines becomes, in my view, inadmissible as a description of experience. It may well be true that she was focused on the lines, but we have no warrant that is uncorrupted by the inquiry about the physical world. Mel is smart and articulate; she could have talked about alignment from the get-go, *but she didn't*—she talked about *something* wrong. I think it likely that that level of indetermination is experientially faithful: it isn't that the *lines are wrong*; it's that *wrongness presents itself*. I don't know that for a fact, because the interview is finished as soon as you asked about the lines, so there was no chance to explore that.

Julian comments: I fully agree that I pushed too hard on the physical realities before getting to Mel's experience. But going back through the transcript, she did mention the lines before my tainted questioning. At 38:18 I ask "And as a, as a fact of the universe, your eyeballs are looking at the screen. [Mel: Mm-hmm.] Is, is that part of your experience at this moment?" Still neutral. In her reply starting at 38:26 she goes on to say "Like I'm, my eyes are physically looking, but I'm like really looking at like, uh, yeah, hang on, why are these lines not lining up?" I don't think there's a *hang on why are these lines not lining up?* thought as a separate thought. Maybe it's intrinsic to Mel's confusion. Or maybe that's a way to describe a sensory aspect of seeing those lines. But I still think (even with my bad questioning) the best we can excavate out of this description is:

[I'm looking at my computer at a redesign for my website. Two horizontal lines in adjacent paragraphs are not lining up.] I'm visually focused on this.

That's my best guess. I'll fully take on board the lesson of where I went wrong. But in terms of coming up with a description, I think that's the best we can do. The "this" is an attempt to leave in some ambiguity. I also tried a version that went like:

[I'm looking at my computer at a redesign for my website. Two horizontal lines in adjacent paragraphs are not lining up.] I'm seeing the website.

This is more broad and neutral. But also carries risks. Being more neutral is not necessarily closer to Mel's experience, which I think (even considering my off-questioning) was more specifically about the lines.

Russ comments: From a perspective of some months later, having carefully reviewed the video, I think it is entirely possible that Mel's experience about the lines was as Julian originally wrote: "two horizontal lines in adjacent paragraphs are not lining up. I'm visually focused on these lines." That is, Julian is

correct when he now writes that “she did mention the lines [at 38:26] before my tainted questioning.” So I was mistaken in my previous comment that “In my view, as soon as one asks for the details of the physical reality, the inquiry about experience is over with, kaput.” However, I am still worried because there had been 11 minutes of problematic question. I think we just don’t know. I do think the first of Julian’s offerings is fair: “[I’m looking at my computer at a redesign for my website. Two horizontal lines in adjacent paragraphs are not lining up.] I’m visually focused on this.

The **yellow** strand about the cycling

Russ comments:

RE “This feeling is not static, and changes over a very short, almost instantaneous period of time. (My impression is of it starting with confusion and then rapidly cycling through the other negatives.)”

I think it likely that this description conflates a self-theory with an apprehended experience, so I would omit that.

Julian comments: You may very well be right. Again, I’ll wait for revising the transcription here. You didn’t yet give a reason why you thought it was more self-theory. So I want to wait to form my own conclusions.

Russ comments: The requested reasons are now to be found in transcript 10 in the series of jangle comments from 30:46 to 46:35

Julian comments: I suggest for the feeling portion of the description:

Not separate from this visual component, I feel confusion / disappointment / annoyance / frustration (it’s unclear if this is one feeling, or multiple, or if it alters over time. There’s no felt bodily location.)

Russ comments: That is okay with me.